

# THE STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION

President Ben Shelly

and

Vice President Rex Lee Jim



*The Executive Branch Report*

Presented to the  
22nd Navajo Nation Council  
October 20, 2014



**2014 FALL SESSION**  
**STATE OF THE NAVAJO NATION**  
**NAVAJO NATION PRESIDENT BEN SHELLY**  
**NAVAJO NATION VICE PRESIDENT REX LEE JIM**  
**OCTOBER 20, 2014**

**S**peaker Pro Tempore, members of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council, visitors, officials, and my fellow Navajo people:

Yá'át'ééh and welcome to the fall session of the 22nd Navajo Nation Council. It is a privilege to join you here today and provide an update from the Executive Branch.

We would first like to begin by saying thank you to the Navajo people for their vote and support to have us serve as your leaders. We were blessed with this opportunity and we appreciate the hard work and dedication from our staff, division directors and many others that served us to achieve the many great accomplishments on behalf of the people.

**PROTECTION OF NAVAJO SOVEREIGNTY**

The Navajo Nation is the greatest tribal nation in all of Indian Country and more often than not, we set the tone for other tribes to follow. Right now, we stand at stand at the precipice of a very important decision that will not only affect our future generations, but possibly the rest of Indian Country as well.

On one side of the divide are our Navajo elders, who taught us that the Navajo language and culture is our foundation, which was handed down to us by the Holy People. On the other side are many of our children and grandchildren who do not speak our language. The decision we must make is much more than just speaking and understanding the language.

**\$554 MILLION SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT**

After years of litigation, the Navajo Nation reached a historic settlement with the federal government for breach of trust responsibilities. In May 2014, I announced the settlement agreement at the State Room and directed my staff to host town hall meetings to include the Navajo people on how the funds can be utilized or invested on their behalf.

This week, we will begin our town hall meetings regarding the use of our \$554 million settlement. There cannot be "too many meetings," as publicized in recent media accounts. To say the Navajo people may be confused by additional discussions is an insult to the voting body of our Nation.

Perhaps if we had more public discussions on funding decisions in the past, we would not have had the discretionary funding debacle that is currently winding its way through the judicial process. The Executive Branch of government administers the laws created by the Legislative Branch, while the Judicial Branch interprets the law. Sometimes we forget these specific responsibilities.

Our town hall meetings will cover profiles of the Navajo Nation including our investment portfolio balances and the future projected revenue. In addition, we will have information on the five-year Capital Improvement Plan and the Tribal Transportation Improvement Plan, as the areas of infrastructure development and roads are always at the forefront for many Navajo chapters.



The town hall meetings will have presentations on shovel ready projects that have completed the necessary clearances and chapter approvals for funding. In this way, they will be focused discussions as opposed to wide-open discussions and wish lists that must begin from the ground level.

### **ALBUQUERQUE NATIVE AMERICAN HOMELESSNESS TASKFORCE**

In late July, three Albuquerque teens beat two homeless Navajo men to death while they slept. Not only were these murders senseless, but they also illustrated the violence our people are exposed to in the neighboring border towns and cities.

I immediately called for a meeting with the Albuquerque mayor to address this issue and called for the FBI to investigate whether or not these were hate crimes perpetrated against our people. We met with Mayor Berry twice, once in Albuquerque and another time in Window Rock.

Since those meetings, we have established a taskforce leader and members, including staff from the Division of Health, Division of Public Safety, Division of Social Services and the Office of the President and Vice President. We also invited the participation of the Navajo Human Rights Commission.

Since those initial meetings, the taskforce has established five goals. These goals include identifying resources from stakeholders and connecting them with the Albuquerque native population, assessments, cultural sensitivity training, improving the quality of life for homeless natives and prioritizing funding for services.

### **NAVAJO CODE TALKER UNIFORM RETURNS HOME**

On August 12, I flew to Reno, Nevada to retrieve the U.S. Marine Corps uniform of the late George H. Kirk, a beloved member of our Navajo Code Talkers. For more than 15 years, this uniform has been lost on the open market, after his storage unit went into default sometime after his passing.

In late Jan. 2014, Etta Arviso, a volunteer of the Navajo Code Talkers Association, informed us that the uniform was for sale through an online auction house. We immediately made contact and requested that it be taken off the auction block.

Craig Gottlieb Military Antiques of Solana Beach, California was the auction house in possession of the uniform. We spoke with Mr. Gottlieb and we negotiated for the return of the uniform. He was willing to donate the uniform as long as it could be on exhibit in a museum for all to see.

We worked with the Navajo Nation Museum and they too, were agreeable to housing the uniform for the generations to come. On August 14, the uniform was unveiled and put on display at the museum in commemoration of Navajo Code Talkers Day. Sadly, in September, we lost four Code Talkers in the span of one week.

We must continue to honor and assist these heroes and role models for our people. The Navajo Code Talkers Museum must become a reality and whether it is funded through private or tribal funds, it is only proper we respect their service on behalf of the American people.

### **NAVAJO DIVISION OF PUBLIC SAFETY**

Last week, we had another Navajo Police officer shot in the line of duty while responding to a call of domestic disturbance. The incident not only underscored the high level of danger our officers face on a daily basis, but also the prevalence of domestic violence on our Nation.

October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and we must continue to battle this horrible abuse afflicting many of our families. Education and awareness must continue, while we work for tougher penalties to be imposed upon perpetrators. Calls of domestic violence continue to keep our officers busy.



The Navajo Police are severely underfunded and undermanned when it comes to the direct services they provide to the Navajo people. Funding them with a portion of the settlement agreement certainly would be a wise investment for the Nation.

In the past quarter, the Department of Corrections secured \$29.9 million to complete the funding requirement of the Chinle Judicial Public Safety facility. This included \$1.4 million for the design of a training academy, which is currently going through the 164-process.

In August, the Arizona Peace Officer and Standards Training Board (AZPOST) submitted their audit report on NDPS. Their audit of 100 commissioned personnel resulted in no findings. All of the personnel were in compliance with the AZPOST standards and requirements, which speaks volumes for our officers on duty.

The Drug and Gang Unit of the NDPS completed operations across the Navajo Nation in response to drug and alcohol activities. They confiscated 17 marijuana plants valued at \$25,500; 255.14 grams of processed marijuana worth \$2,010; 5.87 ounces of methamphetamine with a street value of \$690; and 45 bottles of 40 ounce beer worth \$679.

### **DIVISION OF GENERAL SERVICES**

The big accomplishment for the quarter is the completion of remediation activities for Administration Building Number One. This accomplishment was a major feat for this administration, after decades of neglect and erosion resulted in black mold inside the building.

Not only was the mold an immediate health threat to employees, but it was also a big indication that the building was in need of renovations. The building closure in 2011 displaced hundreds of employees that have been in limbo since.

We are happy to report that the building will be reopened to our employees and the general public this month. The renovations not only cleared away the black mold but also provided state of the art improvements to the building that will take us well into the next few decades with a safe working environment.

During this effort, a mostly all-Navajo workforce was employed throughout the process. This included carpenters, electricians, IT professionals, telecommunications and many others. Administration Building Number Two is currently going through remediation and we anticipate completion in early 2015.

### **LOOKING BACK**

Over the past four years, the Shelly-Jim administration has worked with this Council for the Navajo people. Together, we executed the Commercial Tobacco Free Executive Order, passed the Navajo Sales Tax Distribution Reform Act for scholarships, worked with ADOT to pave Navajo Route 20, updated the Navajo Nation Energy Policy, and purchased a coal mine operated by Navajo Technical Energy Company.

No one branch of our tribal government is stronger than the other. We must all work together to make things work for the benefit of our people. The real governing body of the Nation is the Navajo people and it is through their votes that we continue to lead.

Our administration has been dedicated to thinking outside the box and preparing for the inevitable future that awaits us: loss of support from the American taxpayer. Our energy policy is the key for our future and it will unlock opportunities that have yet to be fully implemented, such as renewable energies and clean coal technology.

For far too long, the yoke of the federal government has prevented us from moving forward in this arena. We are proud to say that after four years of testifying in Washington, D.C. and lobbying Congress, we are beginning to



make headway in our government-to-government relationship with our trustee.

The Shelly-Jim administration saved Navajo Head Start and kept its funding and operation intact on the Navajo Nation. We worked with private entities, tribal entities and the U.S. EPA to renew lease agreements worth billions for the decades to come. We executed direct funding agreements for social services and transportation that strengthened our Navajo sovereignty and self-determination.

However, throughout it all, we worked for the Navajo people and always kept their best interests in mind. We had to make tough decisions that other leaders chose to sidestep because they were too controversial. But that's what leadership is, making the tough call.

It has been an honor and pleasure to serve as your leaders for the past four years. The people have spoken and we respect their decision. Thank you for allowing us to serve the greatest tribal nation on earth and we wish our Navajo people the blessings of the Holy People for the generations to come. Ahe'hee.



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